



**AVIATION AND TRANSIT COMMISSION MINUTES**  
**Tuesday, January 5, 2021**

The Aviation and Transit Commission met via virtual video conferencing on Tuesday, January 5, 2021. Those in attendance included:

**Aviation and Transit Commission Members**

Dan Farmer, Vice Chair  
Ken Behling  
Ron Spence  
Mark Astle  
Chuck Tooley  
David Hummel, Jr.  
Steve Tostenrud

**City Staff and Guests**

Kevin Ploehn, Director of Aviation & Transit  
Shane Ketterling, Assistant Director of Aviation & Transit  
Rusty Logan, Transit Manager

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

A public comment period was offered. No public comments were received.

**INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBER**

Mr. Ploehn introduced Steve Tostenrud as the newest member of the Aviation and Transit Commission. Nearly everyone was familiar with Mr. Tostenrud, as he had served on the Commission for eight years previously. Mr. Tostenrud is a local general aviation pilot and works at First Interstate Bank.

**ANNUAL ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Mr. Ploehn noted that at the beginning of each year, the Commission must elect the Commission Chair and Vice Chair. Commissioner Behling nominated Commissioner Farmer to be the Chair. Commissioner Hummel seconded that nomination. The Commission unanimously approved the nomination and Commissioner Farmer is now the Chair. Commissioner Behling then nominated Commissioner Spence to the Vice Chair and Chair Farmer seconded it. The Commission unanimously approved Commissioner Spence to the Vice Chair position.

**CURRENT GRANT UPDATE**

Mr. Ploehn provided a presentation regarding the Aviation and Transit Grant programs. He began by noting that the silver lining of COVID-19 was the CARES Act, as it provided some real financial benefits to both the Airport and Transit that are reflected throughout the grants. He then discussed the five grants received by the Airport in 2020. One was for the Runway 7/25 study, one for the west end land purchase, two for the Terminal construction, and one for the CARES Act funds. While the Airport would usually have to pay a 10% local match for the construction grants, the CARES Act provided for that during 2020, which was worth \$821,057. The AIP grants for the projects discussed above were for \$7,389,539. With the CARES Act funds for the Airport's operations, the total grant funds for 2020 totaled \$20,931,607. Mr. Ploehn then showed the Commission the amounts still available for use for each grant. The Terminal grants combined still had just over \$2.5 million left. Mr. Ploehn thought that would be enough for the January and February construction payments and indicated that starting in March, the Airport would need to start drawing on their line

of credit with First Interstate Bank. He also pointed out that the Airport had drawn down \$3,883,196 of CARES Act funds to supplement the operational costs for the Airport, leaving \$8,837,815 for the next couple of years.

Mr. Ploehn then discussed MET Transit's recent grants for buses, facilities, and operating costs. Over the last three years, MET has been very fortunate to receive their regular grant amounts plus two competitive grants, plus funding grants from the CARES Act. Over the three years (2018-2020) MET received \$10,631,122. This is what has allowed MET to finally get some buses ordered and to upgrade the technology that MET is using to be more passenger friendly and convenient. Currently, MET has 17 new buses on order.

Mr. Ploehn then discussed the recently passed Coronavirus Response & Relief Supplemental Appropriation Act, which included \$14 billion for Transit and \$2 billion for airports. Mr. Ploehn speculated that both MET and the Airport could receive additional funds in the near future. Mr. Ploehn also informed the Commission that it looked like MET could also get between \$1 and 1.5 million from the State of Montana from their share of the CARES Act.

### **REVISED REAL ID PROMOTIONS**

Mr. Ketterling explained that back in October of 2020, Spotlight Productions asked Airport Administration if they could film a new REAL ID Commercial at the Airport as they had done in the past. The Airport agreed and on November 13, 2020, Airport Operations staff escorted and allowed the film crew and actors to shoot new video on the air carrier ramp that would tie into the previous commercials. Mr. Ketterling showed the new commercial to the Commissioners, which was quite entertaining and informative. This campaign will begin advertising in January and throughout 2021 to remind the public that in order to fly all passengers must have a passport or REAL ID by October 1, 2021.

### **AIRPORT AND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATIVE/OPERATIONS REPORTS**

- ▶ Mr. Ploehn told the Commission that at the December 21, 2020 City Council meeting he provided a presentation on the NorthWestern Energy Lease. The Council wanted staff to come back with a revised lease that addressed landscaping concerns, as well as land donations and a few other items. He indicated that he would be working with NorthWestern Energy on these changes.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn noted that Alpine Aviation was moving forward with their hangar development on the north side of the Airport. He informed the Commission that they are under contract with Morrison-Maierle (the Airport's engineer) for the civil work and that staff would be meeting with Alpine later in the month to discuss leasehold size so a lease could be drafted for them. He pointed out that during some sample core borings to determine the depth of the bedrock some contaminated soil was discovered, possibly left over from when the Air Force occupied the site back in the mid 1960s to mid 1970s. Subsequently, cleanup actions are being discussed and then the contaminated soil will be removed. Also of interest, it was determined that the Airport's water pressure on that side of the runway was not quite adequate for the development of a large hangar fire suppression system, so alternatives are being incorporated to compensate for the substandard pressure. Mr. Ploehn felt that a project would probably have to be developed in the future to get additional water to the north side.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn discussed the voter Initiative LR-130, which allows for the ability to carry a gun in public, either open carry or concealed, without a permit. There was an exception for public buildings; but now HB 102 at the State Legislature is in play and would not allow any exceptions other than where Federal requirements disallowed any guns, such as Airport screening. He told the Commission that he is watching this closely and will report back on this topic.
- ▶ Mr. Ploehn mentioned that the Airport Police and the Airfield and Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighters were in the queue to receive the COVID-19 vaccinations. He told the Commission that he has

been pushing to get the bus drivers and custodians moved up the priority list since they are front line workers with a higher potential to be exposed.

- ▶ Mr. Ketterling showed the Commissioners a few new pictures of the steel beams that were recently installed on the A Concourse that will support the new floor, walls, and roof. He also promised to have a slide show of pictures ready for the February meeting highlighting all of the new progress and improvements that have been made to date.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling provided an update on the proposed TSA amendment that would require airports to screen all aviation workers for prohibited items in order to access the secured areas of the airport. As previously identified, this unfunded mandate would require airports to provide additional screening checkpoints, equipment, staff, infrastructure improvements, etc., in order to screen all airport employees. Since TSA is already screening passengers this would be a duplication of efforts and under Montana code these "administrative searches" could be deemed illegal. Mr. Ketterling explained that all commercial airports within our State, including the Montana Airport Managers Association (MAMA), rallied together in opposition of this requirement and sent letters to TSA and many elected officials from Montana, including Senator Tester who currently is the ranking member on the Subcommittee for Homeland Security. Apparently, TSA received approximately 2,500 responses from airports throughout the country and all of these will take some time to sort through; subsequently, it appears this issue is currently on hold and will most likely require additional vetting of this proposed amendment.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling explained that the Airport Police Division recently worked with the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) training department to update our customized interactive Security Training program that all Airport Identification badge holders are required to attend.
- ▶ Mr. Ketterling identified a few construction projects that Airport staff and engineers from Morrison-Maierle are currently working on that will take place in 2021, these include the following:
  - Rintop Drive Overlay Project. This will require a contractor to improve the existing two miles of a 25', two-lane road that provides the only access in and out of the Airport Business Park. The existing asphalt is over 20 years old and large cracks have developed. The paving contractor will overlay the existing asphalt with a P-403 3/4" asphalt wearing course and install paint markings. This project will take place in late May or early June prior to the BLM firefighting operation starting up.
  - Request for Proposals (RFP) for contractors to provide eight Passenger Boarding Bridges for the Terminal Remodel Project.
  - Schedule 3 of the Ramp Replacement Project. In the Summer of 2021, a contractor will remove and replace the next section of air carrier ramp so that aircraft can park at the new A Concourse by the end of the year.
- ▶ Mr. Logan informed the Commission that MET Transit had filled all operator vacancies and as a result had reinstated service on route 3-Crosstown. Transit Supervisor, Keith Adams, had made multiple recommendations on improving recruiting techniques in December, and had successfully recruited and hired four highly qualified individuals. Mr. Logan also indicated the fixed-route fleet is continuing to have significant maintenance issues, but since Winter has thus far been very light on snowfall, the Airport was able to temporarily reassign one of its mechanics to assist with MET Transit fleet maintenance.
- ▶ Mr. Logan reported MET Transit has now fully implemented its electronic fares system with TouchPass as of January 1. The overall launch has gone relatively smooth and passengers have responded well to the change in processes. As of January 5, MET had over 950 accounts setup on the TouchPass system, with approximately 1/3 of all accounts activated via the mobile app options, while the remaining accounts are utilizing the smart fare card option.
- ▶ Mr. Logan indicated that the Billings City Council approved MET's Public Transit Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) on December 21, 2020. The PTASP is a comprehensive safety plan required by

the Federal Transit Administration and includes safety practices and procedures that follow Safety Management Systems (SMS) principles. Essential aspects of the plan include a Safety Management Policy, Safety Risk Management Practices and Procedures, Safety and Quality Assurance, Safety Promotion, and appropriate documentation of each. In support of this Plan, MET Transit Supervisors have spent a significant amount of time updating and expanding on MET's training practices and policies; as a result, MET now has a comprehensive training program in place for both new hires and existing employees. Further, MET Transit has also formed an internal safety committee comprised of both management and bargaining unit employees that will meet monthly to discuss safety related issues.

- ▶ Mr. Logan updated the Commission on multiple projects at MET, both ongoing and future, he indicated:
  - The LED facility lighting upgrades were completed in December. All MET Transit facilities are now completely outfitted with low energy LED light fixtures.
  - Transit Supervisor, Josh Smith, has started the process of cost analysis for replacement/repair of the METroplex skylights, as well as the bus wash retrofit/rebuild. MET expects to advertise both of these projects in the coming months.
  - Mr. Logan has started the process of writing and planning for a MET Transit Master Plan. This document will provide a long term plan to assist MET in decision making and planning for future growth. Mr. Logan indicated this project has been planned into this year's Unified Planning Work Program using available 5303 funds and is anticipated to be completed prior to fiscal year end.

#### **ITEMS FROM THE COMMISSION**

- ▶ Chair Farmer asked when the new buses were expected to be delivered. Mr. Logan replied that they are currently scheduled to begin showing up in May – June, assuming there are no more COVID-19 related delays.
- ▶ Vice Chair Spence asked why MET does not buy extra buses. Mr. Logan responded that the FTA establishes a spare ratio that they will help fund. Anything more than that would require MET to fully fund themselves.
- ▶ Chair Farmer wondered if we could consider meeting in person again. Mr. Ploehn noted that the Governor's recent policy announcement still keeps a lot of the same requirements in place until the vaccination effort is further along. Mr. Ploehn felt we should do the February meeting as a virtual video conferencing meeting and consider the following months at that meeting.
- ▶ Commissioner Hummel asked if staff had any additional information on COVID-19 testing for international flights. Mr. Ploehn acknowledged that this is an issue. Getting a pre-flight test out of the U.S. was not a huge issue, but trying to get back could be. He would continue to watch this and report back additional information at the February meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

KP:mdb

cc: Aviation and Transit Commission  
Chrono  
City Administrator  
Mayor  
City Clerk